

DPH Announces Second Flu Death of the Season: Holds Annual Legislative Hall Flu Clinic

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) held its final community flu clinic of the 2016-2017 flu season on Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2017 at the Legislative Hall Library. The annual event is open to the public and 31 people were vaccinated.

Additionally, DPH is announcing the second flu-related death for the 2016-2017 season. A 98-year-old New Castle County woman who had underlying health conditions and passed away last week. She had been diagnosed with influenza A.

To date, Delaware has 285 confirmed flu cases for the 2016-2017 season, with 77 requiring hospitalization. Of the 285 confirmed cases, 138 have been in New Castle County, 93 in Kent County, and 54 in Sussex County. These numbers reflect lab-confirmed cases and the number of individuals in the community with influenza or influenza-like illnesses, is likely much higher.

DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay says flu activity, which generally ramps up in January and February, has increased significantly in the past two weeks, and is much higher than at this time last year. The percentage of flu-related hospitalizations is also higher than last year at this time, and many of the hospitalized are elderly persons.

“Flu season is in full swing,” said Rattay, “but it’s still not too late to get vaccinated for this year as we continue to see flu cases into May. The vaccine takes two weeks to take effect so it is important that if you have not yet received

your flu vaccine, you do so at your earliest convenience.”

Everyone over 6 months old, including the elderly and pregnant women, should receive an annual flu vaccination to protect against the virus. Getting vaccinated protects not only you, but also your family, friends, co-workers, and everyone around you by decreasing their chances of contracting the virus.

The flu can be particularly hard on the elderly and other vulnerable people, such as those with underlying health conditions. Dr. Rattay encouraged loved ones of vulnerable populations to make sure they and any health care workers and assisted living staff are vaccinated. Family and friends should check on vulnerable persons regularly, especially if they do develop flu-like symptoms, which include cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. While more common in children, some people might also experience vomiting or diarrhea.

Contact a doctor if symptoms worsen or someone has an underlying medical condition. A doctor may prescribe antiviral drugs. Antivirals are a second line of defense to treat the flu. It can lessen the symptoms, shorten the illness, and prevent complications. However, a flu vaccine is still the first and best way to prevent the flu.

Flu shots will still be available at DPH clinics located within the State Service Centers. A list is available at <http://flu.delaware.gov> or by calling 800-282-8672.

Vaccines are also available at many pharmacies and grocery stores, as well as through primary care physicians and some specialists. To find participating stores, enter your zip code in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) flu vaccine finder at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

The annual flu vaccination is your best protection against the virus, but DPH stressed the importance of taking further precautions against the flu virus such as washing your hands

regularly, especially after coughing or sneezing, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue that is immediately disposed of, and staying home from work, school, or other engagements if you are sick with flu-like illnesses. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet. You should not return to your regular activities until you are fever-free (100 degrees F [37.8 degrees C]), without fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.